

Merritt Parkway, Huntington Road Bridge  
Spanning Huntington Road at the 35 mile mark  
on the Merritt Parkway  
Stratford  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-126

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CONN,  
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#### PHOTOGRAPHS

#### WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

### **Merritt Parkway, Huntington Road Bridge**

HAER No. CT-126

**Location:** Spanning the Huntington Road at the 35 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Stratford, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.655840.4566540  
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** May 1940

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Charter Oak Construction Company

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Huntington Road

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In spring 1639, sixty-five settlers came to Cupheag (now Stratford) on the west bank of the Housatonic River where it meets the Long Island Sound. This group migrated from Wethersfield, led by the Reverend Adam Blakeman.<sup>1</sup>

As the town grew, land was bought from the surrounding Indian tribes until the community stretched twelve miles long and ten miles wide. In 1685, Stratford received its town patent from the Colonial Government of Connecticut. The community retained its original boundaries until 1789 when Huntington was granted civic independence; Trumbull separated in 1797, Bridgeport in 1821, and Monroe in 1823. The present town covers an area of nineteen-and-one-half square miles.<sup>2</sup>

Early Stratford was primarily a shipping and fishing center. The community was also the main crossing point for the Housatonic River. A ferry operated on the river from 1648 until the first bridge was built in 1795.<sup>3</sup>

The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad reached town in 1850. The railroad failed to bring manufacturing enterprises, but did encourage the summer-vacation industry. At the same time, the buying and selling of real estate became big business in Stratford.

The railroad also helped neighboring Bridgeport develop into a manufacturing center. Even though Bridgeport developed rapidly, Stratford remained primarily a residential community. The town's population started to increase in the 1880s as industrial workers from Bridgeport moved to

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<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Euerle, "History of Stratford, 1637-1989," (Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>Euerle, 2.

<sup>3</sup>"Stratford, the Unhurried Town," (Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1959), 2.

Stratford, to escape the noise and pollution within that city. This migration increased after 1890, when the Bridgeport Horse Car Company introduced service to Stratford. Within five years ridership warranted extending and electrifying the line.<sup>4</sup>

When plans for the Merritt Parkway were first announced, Stratford residents were upset by the route, which called for the road to cut south into their downtown before linking up with the Post Road/U.S. Route 1, and crossing the Housatonic River on the Washington Bridge. They realized the congestion this would create in their community and campaigned for a second bridge spanning the Housatonic.<sup>5</sup> In 1938 the state obtained federal funding to build the Housatonic River Bridge. After completion the parkway does not appear to have had a dramatic impact on Stratford. The town was already a bedroom community for Bridgeport, and too far from New York City to attract a high number of commuters.

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The Huntington Road begins in downtown Stratford and proceeds north to Waverly Road in the town of Shelton. The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from the Huntington Turnpike, in Trumbull, to Cutspring Road, in Stratford (ConnDot project #180-130). While the Huntington Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Charter Oak

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<sup>4</sup>"Stratford, the Unhurried Town," 4.

<sup>5</sup>Helen Binney Kitchel, "Story of the Merritt," Greenwich Press, 28 April 1938, p. 15.

Construction Company.<sup>6</sup> The bridge cost \$26,050 and was completed in May 1940. The paving work for this region of the Merritt also extended from Main Street/Route 25 to Cutspring Road. This contract was awarded to the Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT (ConnDot project #180-169). The Huntington Road Bridge has received little maintenance since it was erected.<sup>7</sup>

### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Huntington Road Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge. The frame spans 35'-5-1/4" at a skew of 21°-23'-45" over the 30' wide roadway. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge on a clear roadway 74'-4" wide.

The rigid-frame design for the Huntington Road Bridge differs from most of the other bridges on the Merritt Parkway because it is shaped like a segmental arch, instead of an arched beam, supported on walls. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The walls, which are the frame legs, are exposed about 7' above the roadway. The arch rises 7'-9" from the springline. The walls are a constant thickness of about 2', but the arch thins to 1' at the crown. The spandrels of the arch are filled with gravel and bounded by reinforced-concrete walls at the faces. The minimum clearance provided is 14' at a distance of 10' perpendicular from the centerline of the road.

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<sup>6</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>7</sup>Huntington Road Bridge, DOT #756; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

Construction joints occur between the footings and the elements they support. Above the foundation, the frame and pylons are poured separately. Construction joints also occur between the spandrel wall and the frame span and between the railing and the pylon. A 1/2"-wide cork or rubber-filled expansion joint separates the pylons from the wing walls.

The pylons are the main visual element of the bridge. Each pylon is a smooth 4'-5" wide face flanked by columns of triangular-shaped horizontal ridges. Each ridge extends about 2'-6" beyond the pylon. At the wall, the ridges wrap around the spandrel and under the arch. At the railing, the ridges are repeated in two more columns each side of the pylon. The rest of the main span railing is divided with vertical indentations into three solid panels. On each side of the indentation, a beveled diamond shape is formed into the railing. A beveled square is formed at the center of each panel.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Kitchel, Helen Binney. "Story of the Merritt." Greenwich Press. April 28, 1938, p. 15.

-----, "Stratford, the Unhurried Town." Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1959.

-----, Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

-----, Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

### PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.